

# Community Preventive Services Task Force Recommends Against Privatization of Retail Alcohol Sales

The Community Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force), an independent, nonfederal, unpaid group of public health and prevention experts, [recommends against](#) privatization of retail alcohol sales in places that currently have government control, based on evidence that privatization leads to increased consumption of alcoholic beverages, excessive drinking and related harms. Excessive alcohol consumption is responsible for 80,000 deaths each year and cost the U.S. economy \$223.5 billion in 2006. The Task Force finding and *The Guide to Community Preventive Services* (*The Community Guide*) evidence review appear in the April 2012 issue of the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

## What is Privatization of Retail Alcohol Sales?

Privatization of retail alcohol sales is the repeal of state, county, city, or other types of governmental control over the retail sales of alcoholic beverages, which allows commercial retailing. States with government control of alcohol sales are referred to as *control* states, and states with privatized sale are referred to as *license* states. The privatization of retail alcohol sales applies to off-premises alcohol outlets, or places where alcohol is sold for the buyer to drink elsewhere (e.g., liquor stores), and does not generally affect the retail sales of alcoholic beverages at on-premises alcohol outlets (e.g., bars or restaurants).

*The Community Guide* systematic review included scientific evidence from 18 studies, of which 17 assessed the impact of privatization on the consumption of alcoholic beverages that were and were not privatized. Following privatization, consumption of privatized beverages within the jurisdiction that underwent privatization increased by a median of 44.4%, and consumption of non-privatized beverages within the jurisdiction that underwent privatization experienced a small 2.2% decrease, resulting in substantial net increases in alcohol use. Nearly all of the studies used alcohol sales or tax data to estimate excessive alcohol consumption, which is a well-established way to measure this. One study in Sweden found that re-monopolization was associated with a general reduction in alcohol-related harms.

The Task Force recommendation against privatization of retail alcohol sales is based solely on evidence related to public health consequences, which may be one of several factors to consider when making decisions on whether to privatize retail alcohol sales.

As of March 2012, three U.S. states control the off-premises consumption retail sales of both wine and spirits, and an additional 10 states maintain control over the retail sale of spirits alone.

## Excessive Alcohol Use

Excessive alcohol use causes 80,000 deaths each year, and for each death due to alcohol, on average, an individual's life is cut short by 30 years. Drinking too much is also a risk factor for many health and social problems, including motor-vehicle crashes, violence, suicide, hypertension, sexually transmitted diseases, unintended pregnancy, fetal alcohol syndrome, and sudden infant death syndrome. Most people who drink too much are not alcohol dependent.

## For More Information

Click on the following links to learn more about this topic.

- *The Community Guide* review and Task Force finding for [Preventing Excessive Alcohol Consumption: Privatization of Retail Alcohol Sales](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Alcohol and Public Health Website](#)